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AND

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Child-Songs and Sea-Songs.

SONNET : TO VICTOR HUGO.

“**S**UFFER the little children that they come
And forbid them not !”—Father, the sweet Christ-
word

That touched the ears and hearts of them that erred,
And bade with gentleness their lips be dumb
And pitiful, yet lives, and fears succumb,—
Yea, children’s trembling, now the word is heard
Tenderly as of yore, when Jesus stirred
The spirits of them that stilled :—“ Let children come !”

I have no fear, my Father, I have no fear !
Even as a child I come, and Thou wilt place
Thy hand upon my brow, and Thy Christ-grace
Will fold my feeble spirit and bid take cheer :—
I have no fear, O Father, I fear not Thee,
Who art even a child in Thine immensity !

PRELUDE.

STRAYING in sleep amid bowers
Lit with pale blossom of flowers,
Where the sun-melody cowers

And sleeps,
Where there is neither the light
Of the moon nor the star-delight,—
Only a tremulous twilight

There keeps
Watch 'mid the tender hours ;—

I hear a low sound, as the sigh
Of children slumbering, steal by,
Spread wings as a wind and die ;—

A flower
Heavy with sweetness fails,
But its death in no measure avails
To deaden its odour ;—so pales

The power
Of the sound, but still on me doth lie :—

It bears my steps downward ; the trees
Grow thinner, the blossoms release
My footsteps, the faint shadows cease ;—

Lo ! the mild
Expanse of the many-sphered sky
Bends flower-wise its infinity
O'er the sea that beneath it doth lie—

A child
Cradled with slumber of peace.

And, seeing it there slumbering, I start
 And wonder : Is this thou that art
 The visible pulse of Time's heart,—

Thou, Sea ?

Can sleep as a flow'ret make mild
 Thee, can he soften thy wild
 Music,—art also a child ?.....

“ Ah me !

Listen,” she lisps, “ my child-part.”

TWO CRADLE SONGS.

I.

THE footprints of winter He fills
 With fairest lilies, when spring
 Rejoices the earth,—

And He

Hath care for each snow-feeble thing,
 Each lily He strews, as in worth
 One with the sun on the hills !—

Shall we

Take thought for a lovelier birth, —
 For Thee ?

The tender-woven down of the nest
 Hushes each plaintive appeal
 Of the unplumed birds,—

But He

Harkens the plaint and shall heal !

O Thou, my sweet bird, thy half-words
 Are stilled with the warmth of my breast,
 But we,
 Shall we fear lest He miss notes that steal
 From Thee ?

Hush, hush thee, my Babe ! lo, the stars
 Make tremble the heavens with the thrill
 Of their golden ways,—
 But He
 Knows each one by name and doth will
 Its awfulest passage or stays ;—
 Ah ! hush thee, my Babe, the sun-cars
 Hath He
 To brighten or darken ;—ah ! hush thee, my Bird,
 —shall He fill
 Thee with song for His praise,
 Or Thee
 Shall He still ?

TWO CRADLE SONGS.

2.

THE sea-mew from the summer-sweet sea is flown
 To its summer-soft nest
 That hushes with tenderest down the moan
 Of the vast sea-unrest,

But its sweetness is not from the waters yet gone ;—
 So, Bird on my breast,
 Thy day-delight lingers,—not yet is it flown !
 Sleep, my own, sleep !

The faint winds fail ! can it be they have heard,
 From an angel on high,
 The sweet low tones of a secretest word
 Bidding them die,
 Lest with their soft whispering the bird's sleep be stirred ?
 Ah, Bird that wilt fly
 Never, what word for *thy* sleep's sake is heard ?
 Sleep, my own, sleep !

The stars come forth ; the hushed heaven takes delight
 At the touch of their feet,
 And the sea-mew sleeps calmer because of the might
 That through heaven doth beat ;—
 The stars come forth : but thy slumber takes light
 Of a star-world more sweet,—
 Even the dreams that make smile with delight
 Thee, my own !—sleep !

A SEA SORROW.

“ **A**H, May child, ah, child May, art gone ?”
 I heard
 A voice from the sea
 Singing,—and all the old sound to her clinging

Faded,—and even of the silence was born,
 Sweetlier than all the old-world melody,
 A Word.

“ Ah, child May, ah, May child, art gone ?.....
 Ah, child,
 Hast smilingly fled
 Lightly,—for 'mid all my children most brightly
 Playing,—I can see not *thee* child of the Morn,—
 Child of the Morn, ah, birth of the bride-bed
 Most wild.”

“ Ah, May child, ah, child May, art gone ?.....
 The flowers
 Blossom and breathe
 Glistening,—yea, all the still flower-life is listening,
 Braided,—by hands that now overworn,
 Have woven of their whiteness a various wreath
 For the hours.”

“ Ah, child May, ah, May child, thou art gone !.....
 The breezes
 That have lightened with thee
 Gladdening,—now tremble and falter as saddening,
 Straying—with flower-feeble o'er me wan.”
 Ah, May child, ah, sea-child, all the sea *ceases*
 Ceases !

SEA SWEETNESS.

THE sweetness of still waters !—they can breathe
Hardly for sweet stress of the summer-hush
That weighs as sleep upon them :—Take thy spirit
From off mine—it doth crush it !—Pity me !

The sweetness of sea-music !—Faint, ah, faint
Is it, but yet the breezes cannot bear
The burthen but they loosen it,—ah, Love,
Could I but loose *that* fainter !—Pity me !

The sweetness of the sea-ways !—twilight-souled
They tremble with strange blossoms, and the sun,
The moon, and stars, they know not ; neither know
The common lights our love-ways !—Pity me !

The sweetness of sea-memories !—They shall fail
Never, nor darken till the world be done,
But be a joy for all time,—ah, Love, Love,
Would God *our* memories also !—Pity me !

“SUFFER THE CHILDREN.”

I heard a voice of sorrow through the night
Speaking : “O, suffer the children that they come,
The little children !”—and a wondrous light
Fulfilled my sleep though all the stars were dumb !

A voice of plaintive pity, as of a child
Weeping for all the sorrow seen on earth,
A voice of piteous outcry, as of wild
Sea-wailing !—“Give me, Man, my fairest birth,

Give me my little children ! Lo, for long,—
Yea, years on years I have waited for a sound,
A sight of mine own, coming :—they are strong,
Strong are they surely now, the fears that bound

And wants that sapped their spirits, withered, they
Have spirit and strength to seek me ; man has heard
My word of old time spoken and doth stay
Them now no longer, but with gentlest word

And piteous doth support them !—ah, they come,
Surely they come to Jesus ;—He shall give
Light to their blindness, and unto their dumb
Sweet lips a song for ever, and bid them live !—

Ah, give to me my children !—Oh, Man, Man,
What have I done to thee that thou should'st hold
My loveliest from my love ?—lo ! all I can
I offer as I offered, even of old ;—

I gave to the world my life ; I gave, O man,
Pity unto thee pitiless, warmth to thee cold,
Love to thee loveless !—Lo, the frail birds can
Come to me, yea, the little birds can fold

Their wings and know my comfort ; but the birds,
The tenderer birds, the children !—ye have torn
The plumage from them, ye have stilled the words
Purer than purest song-notes with thy scorn,

O Man, with thy dire envy, and their power
 Is lost to seek me, sing can they not being dumb :
 Ah, thou hast rent their plumage and they cower !—
 Suffer the little children that they come !”

* * * * *

And the voice ceased and tears blinded my sleep,
 Yea, all my sleep ached to have heard the cry :
 For in my sleep I knew Him that did weep
 And moan for pain of the child-misery !

A SEA DREAM.

A silver ship on a silver sea—
 Ah, the dim still light !—
 Comes sailing with swiftness no wind's melody,
 No wind-spell's might.
 Could waft o'er the quivering waters to me :
 —Ah, the dim still light
 On the sea !—

“What is it that wafts it, what is it can be
 In the dim still light,
 For the children of April have tenderly
 Taken fleet flight ?
 What is it can urge it so mightily
 In the dim still light
 On the sea ?”

And my spirit stills, for the silence to lea
 —Ah, the dim still light !—
 And to windward weighs on me, and ever doth flee,
 Waxing ever more bright,
 The ship, as a star when it shoots thro' heaven free,
 Thro' the dim still light,
 O'er the sea !

* * * * *

A silver voice on the silver sea !
 —And the dim still light
 Quivers :—" Ah, foolish one, dost thou not see,
 —Ah, open thy sight !—
 Thy Lady of Love, the long-loved one of thee ?.....
 Ah, the dim still light
 On the sea !

* * * * *

A death-black pall on a death-black sea !
 —Ah, the dim still light
 Withered !—Oh, can'st thou not, memory,
 Of the past delight
 Gather one blossom to stay misery ?.....
 —Ah, the dim still light
 On the sea !

A CRY.

AH, the children, ah, the tender
 Children, listen to the cry !—
 Ah, ye rich ones, can ye render
 Count of the child-misery ?

Ah, ye children ! He hath sent you
Naked, that the world might clothe !—
Ah, ye bare ones ! hath man lent you
Any garment of his love ?

Ah, ye frail ! He sent you frailest ;
For He said : Hath not man might,
Strength to gird them !—Ah, thou palest,
Surely, man, and veils't thy sight !

Ah, ye dumb ! He sent you voiceless,
For He said : Even birds take song
From their kindred !—Ah, rejoiceless,
Songless, shall ye suffer long ?

Ah, ye little ones, the anguish
Is upon you of the womb !
Ah, ye tender ones, ye languish,
For the shadow of the tomb

Is upon you, and ye carry
It as clothing for your bare
Spirits !—Ah, how long shall tarry
Man to rend it from you here ?

Ah, ye rich ones, *they* forgive you,
Even the poor bruised ones forgive !—
Ah, ye cruel, shall *He* give you
Mercy, shall *He* suffer live ?

CHILD LOVE.

OH, the tiny fingers weave,
Ever working, a faint wreath
Of flowers fair beyond belief,
Woven of tenderest joy and grief !
It doth knit
Men's souls who breathe
Fearfully, lest they should move
And shatter it—
Even break the wreath,—
Child-love !

Oh, upon the brow of night
Shadowing earth, God, in his might,
Sets a fairest crown of light
That shineth starwise in earth's sight !
All the winds
Of heaven unite
To shatter it, but still doth prove
Strong 'gainst the winds,
The crown of light,—
Child-love !

A SEA-WORD.

THE dim sea-caves
Take voice where the sea
Clings to them as seeking for melody,
When the moonlight laves
The sea !

The faint sea flowers
Drink life where the light
Of the Day-star sinks spirit-sweetened with night,
When the spring-tide hours
Wax bright.

The fleet sea-flocks,
They wend where the wind
Wills, and his fingers their tresses unbind,
And shake loose to the rocks—
Sea-signed.

The shrill sea-birds
They scatter their flight
When day droops, and over the waves walks night,
But they strew not their words'
Delight.

There is rest in the caves,
Though the sea-sound there thrills
And the bright pulse of melody fills and re-fills
With the life that saves,
And stills.

There is sleep in the flowers,
And their petals are fed
And fragrant with dreams white golden and red,
That sink softly as showers
Star-shed.

There is joy with the flocks,
 Though when spring is gone
 They grew gentlier with sadness and wander forlorn,
 And the summer-sky mocks
 Them out-worn.

O the birds, the sea-birds !—
 O, list to the notes
 That float where the raiment of morning floats,
 Till the robe of night girds
 The notes !

.

I bring to thee rest from the caves,—
 Not of graves,—
 I bring to thee dreams from the bowers
 Of sea flowers,—
 I bring to thee joy from the flocks
 Summer mocks,
 And my melody echoes the words
 Of sea-birds:—
 I bring to thee song from the sea,—
 Sing thou of me !

SONNET : ON READING VICTOR HUGO'S
 "PETIT PAUL."

TIS even such sweetness as the starry speech
 Sweetening through heaven at the Jesus-birth,

Father, thy speech has given unto the earth
 That wonders, knowing not whence the word doth reach
 It's wounded spirit to heal it and to teach
 Strength of child-weakness, even though the child-worth
 Has ne'er departed from it, but still through the dearth
 Of time was with it, speechless,—that now finds speech !

Ah ! 'tis such sweetness as the sea's when night
 Descends to soften from off her the day-light
 That tortured to strange tempest :—still and mild
 She sweetens in the moonbeam, and her might
 Melts with the mingling influence, till the wild
 Winds, woe of night, fold wings above her—a child !

A SEA-MOOD.

O SEA, O sacred Sea, O sun-loved Sea,
 O Mother of changeful, changeless harmony,
 O wan with waters blithe,
 Be with me in my life about to be,
 Sweeten my worldly strife,
 O mother, with thy sweet sea-word of life ;—
 Give to me Love, even Love long lost to me,
 Love whom I have lost and have known not where to find
 Though every tenderest wind
 Of thine hath led me where thou hast offered light,
 Music, yea, sleep not known to the spirit of night,—
 All, all but Love :—of old, 'tis surely said,
 Thou hast lightened with the violet-cincturèd,—

Whose smile was very might,—
But this is not her whom I seek ; thou hast
A love more fair, more fearful, a delight
Tenderer with thy rapt mystery and more bright
With thy bright being :—grant me this Love, this last !

My dream is silent, and all the sea is still ;—
In the star-bowers the stars work out their will,
Weaving with thread of light
The oft-woven web wherethrough the dawn doth thrill
And make the pathways bright,
Wherein the very god unveils his sight,
Kindling the utter heavens with shafts that kill.—
The sea is silent ; but lo ! where o'er the sea,
A light, a melody,
Quickens in heaven where now the moon takes way,
The frail faint moon whose flower-laden orb doth stray
Loosening its flowers and casting to the waves ;—
And in the tender trembling where the sea laves
The scattered blooms as of May,
A Shape arises, born as of the flowers,
That lifting looks to shoreward dimly grey,
Sets fairest limbs in motion, feet that out-weigh
Not the still lightness of the summer-hours.

The Shape moves toward me, and on her lips strange light
Entwined with stranger shade makes shadow-bright
The air that thrills and stirs
Around her coming and dims my yearning sight,

And on my dream-touched ears
A sound as of inmost sea-sound the moon hears,
Trembles,—and in my soul a dream-delight
Takes voice and echoes music the Shape makes :—
“ O sad one, the Sea slakes
Thy thirst as the thirst of all things, though the time
Be not their own to choose, nor is it thine
Though now it be come upon thee :—know the Sea
Sends me her child to bear her word to thee,
Sends Love from the secret clime
Wherethrough she wanders smiling ;—thus she saith :
“ I send thee, child, my word to sing and shine
Before thee, and Love to bid thee not repine,
But child, my word, my love to thee is—death.”

FROM VICTOR HUGO.

VICTORY, friends ! I give wing
In haste, in the full-breathed dawn
To a bulletin where sing
The light and the love of morn.

I blow a blast on the hills,
A blast of rapture and might ;
Know all that the fair spring fills
With lilies the footprints of night.

Jane slippers her softest feet,
Her feet that are now not frail :
Lo ! how the god's pulses beat,
Fulfilling yon heaven's blue vale !

The plumed birds sing, the lambs bleat ; -
May, mocking with cries night-powers,
Puts winter in full retreat
With a mitrailleuse of flowers.

FROM VICTOR HUGO.

THE tomb said to the rose :
“ With the dawn-tears which uncloseth
Thy petals, flower of love,
Rose, what dost thou ?”
The rose said to the tomb :
“ With all those that still come
To thy wide gulph from above,
Tomb, what dost thou ?”

The rose said : “ Sombre tomb,
These tears that from dawn come
I mould to honeyed scent
And amber light.”
The tomb said : “ Plaintive flower,
For each soul in my power,
To heaven above is sent
An angel bright !”

TWO SONNETS :
ON HEARING NEWS OF THE AFGHAN
DISASTER, JULY 28, 1880.

I.

I HEARD the sweet sea-mother wail in sleep,
The summer-sleep, even as wild winter leant
Heavily, timeless, and her bright being bent
And brake with direst hurt,—deep within deep,
Thus moaning :—“ Ah ! strange harvest dost thou reap,
My child, my England, of the sea-seed given
Of old time to thee of empire whereof heaven
Some portion still within sun-watch should keep !

O child, thine old sea-glories are become
A bitterest curse to man, yea, even thy bright
Sea-memories, and the sun-watch loathes the sight
Wherefrom it can rest never, nor be dumb ;—
Ah child, ah miserable, hast made *my* ways
The means wherewith thou hast gotten thy blood-grace ?

II.

Take off from me the burthen !—I have death
Mixed with my live blithe waters, and I heave
With pleasure of its presence and can breathe
Hardly for too strong spirit of the breath

Of old that sweetened through me ;—the earth hath
Great joy of those caught to her, and the earth-might
Grows greatlier for them,—but her death-delight
Pales within mine who have Shelley for *one* death !

I have blood upon my waters, I have blood !
Yea, even the heart's blood of them that erst withstood
The ruin of Spanish ravage, and have cried
Never to have it off me, nor have rued
The stain war wrought upon my spotless pride ;—
But, ah, the burthen of them that have but now died !”





